

Delaware WONDER Expanding Services to Support Delawareans Receiving Food Benefits to Break Barriers, Find Jobs

NEW CASTLE (July 23, 2018) – A USDA-funded program designed to help food benefits recipients in Delaware increase their earning power and decrease their dependence on state benefits is expanding its services to eligible participants.

Delaware WONDER (Work Opportunity Networks to Develop Employment Readiness), a program administered by the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services' (DHSS) Division of Social Services (DSS), offers free training in fields such as basic construction, forklift operation, rigging and signal calling, flagging, culinary arts, hospitality, guest services, front desk and restaurant services, and manufacturing. To be eligible, people must have opened food benefits cases on or after Feb. 1, 2016.

The program received approval in June to expand its barrier reductions package to eligible participants to make sure people in need of jobs don't face barriers in getting and keeping them. These services include hotel vouchers, rent or mortgage assistance to prevent eviction or homelessness; auto repair to enable grant participants to get to work or job interviews; and interview/day-to-day workplace attire or workplace uniforms.

"We know that sustainable employment is a key part of an individual's health and the health of a community," said Dr. Kara Odom Walker, Cabinet Secretary for DHSS. "Having the use

of these additional tools to reduce the barriers faced by those looking for employment is another step forward for Delaware WONDER.”

“We are grateful for the WONDER grant resources, which are helping so many people in our state find well-paying, permanent jobs,” said DSS Director Ray Fitzgerald. “With the additional barrier reduction funding, we will be able to reach more of our critical-needs population who have been historically shut out of the job search process – people who lack education, permanent housing, reliable transportation or child care.”

In 2015, Delaware was one of 10 states chosen by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to receive a three-year federal grant to collaborate with community partners in providing employment and training services for people who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. The USDA funded programs in the 10 states as a research project to determine the most effective ways to prepare people who receive food benefits for career paths with a higher earning potential. Each state’s results will go through an extensive evaluation process.

From Feb. 1, 2016, through June 30, 2018, 3,224 people participated in the Delaware WONDER program and 1,317 of those participants obtained employment while in the program. Due to the success of WONDER, DHSS plans to continue offering similar services by transitioning the state’s existing employment and training model to more closely mirror the WONDER approach once the USDA grant ends in December. Due to the reduced funding once the grant ends, it is likely fewer clients will be served.

For more information about WONDER, contact a New Castle County Outreach Specialist at 302-761-6794; a Kent/Sussex County Outreach Specialist at 302-422-1133; or de_wonder@delaware.gov.